

## **Attitudes of Omani Social Studies Student Teachers to Tourism for Sustainable Development**

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The aim of the study is to investigate the attitudes of student teachers of Social Studies to tourism for sustainable development. The study participants were the entire cohort of final year student teachers of Social Studies in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman. There were 65 in total, 26 male and 39 female. Data was gathered through a questionnaire consisting of 37 items divided into 6 areas: attitudes to tourism; the impact of tourism on the economy; the impact of tourism on society and culture; the negative influences of tourism; tourism management, and working in the tourism sector. The results showed that student teachers of Social Studies hold positive attitudes towards tourism for sustainable development. There was no significant difference with regard to gender.

**Keywords:** social studies; student teachers; sustainable development; attitudes; Sultanate of Oman

### **Introduction**

The globalization of capitalism has resulted in tourism becoming one of the most important industries in today's world. Developments in transportation and communication technology, rising incomes and an increase in leisure time are bringing about a rapid growth in tourist numbers around the world (Sirakaya, Ercan, Tazim Jamal, & Hwan-Suk Choi, 2001; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005). The WTO (2000) estimated that the number of tourists will reach 1602 million by the year 2020 and will generate an income of \$200 billion, a figure which has motivated countries around the world to become part of the industry and gain a share of its profits.

Both developed and developing countries have become interested in developing their tourism sector because of the expectation that this will lead to an increase in job opportunities, improvements in living standards and the development of rural areas (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2003). However, tourism also has negative effects, and governments, tourism sectors, environmental and social associations, researchers and the World Tourism Organization are well aware of these. As a result, they have developed a strategy known as tourism for sustainable development which is aimed at reducing the negative effects of tourism and thus ensuring the development of positive attitudes towards the industry. A further aim of this strategy is to promote the conservation of environmental and community culture.

Tourism for sustainable development was established to enhance the existing conceptual framework for tourism planning and development (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005). The (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2004) defines tourism for sustainable development as "using and developing tourism resources in a way which allows the enjoyment both of residents and visitors, while at the same time, ensures that these resources will be preserved for use by future generations'.

Tourism for sustainable development has been viewed as a strategy which helps to develop a nation's income and living standards; it also helps to preserve the environmental features. (McIntyre, 1993; Sirakaya et al., 2001; Kandampully, 2000). Other writers, Chia-Pin, Charles and Shu (2011) viewed it as a strategy which helps to reduce the negative effects of tourism on countries' culture and environment, while gaining them financial profit from the industry.

If a country is to achieve the purpose of sustainable development, it must take into account its people's attitudes to tourism, as their acceptance or rejection will affect the success of tourism projects. The literature indicates the importance of developing people's positive attitudes towards tourism (Manning, 1995; Teye, Sirakaya, & Sönmez, 2002; Esu, 2008) because these attitudes are a major factor in determining the success or otherwise of tourism development (Kathleen & Christine, 2000; Gunn, 1994). A number of studies have shown that people hold positive attitudes to tourism for a variety of reasons, one being the financial profits involved (McCool & Martin 1994; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Andereck, 1995). Other reasons are the contribution of tourism to increasing job opportunities (Gilbert & Clark 1997), to developing standards of living (Lankford 1994; McCool & Martin 1994); to encouraging cultural activities and conserving heritage (Gilbert & Clark, 1997; Matthew & Goodwin, 2001); and towards developing markets for agriculture (Lepp, 2006).

On the other hand, many people consider tourism to have a negative impact, so that some reject it outright, while others accept it but worry about its negative effects. Negative attitudes to tourism have been shown to result from a number of factors: it is seen as causing an increase in the cost of living, an increase in crime, overcrowding, an increase in prostitution, and in anti-social behaviour (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Mok, Slater, & Cheung, 1991; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997). Some people fear its effect on the environment, particularly on endangered areas (Doggart & Doggart, 1996).

Within any society, teachers are a group of people who play a major role in developing their students' attitudes to many subjects; they can thus be expected to strongly affect their students' attitudes to tourism. It is therefore important to investigate not only the attitudes of practising teachers, but also those of student teachers, as they will later contribute to the attitudes of those they teach. Their positive or negative attitudes will be reflected in the way they teach topics related to tourism. Indeed, the literature shows that teacher attitudes toward a subject affect their students' attitudes toward this subject (Uusimaki & Nason, 2004; Beswick, 2006; Wilkins & Brand, 2004; Swan, Bell, Phillips, & Shannon, 2000; Beswick, 2007). Teachers will thus develop not only their students' knowledge about tourism but also their attitudes towards tourism projects and towards working in such projects (Boud, Solomon, & Symes, 2001; Busby, 2003). They can also foster their students' values of tolerance towards others and understanding of others. (Doherty, Guerrier, Jamieson, Lashley, & Lockwood, 2001; Jenkins, 2001; Boud et al., 2001; Ladkin, 2002; Busby, 2003).

The aim of this study, then, is to investigate the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies, towards tourism for sustainable development. There are several reasons for conducting the study: first, the shortage of studies evaluating student teachers' attitudes towards tourism for sustainable development and, second, the effect these student teachers will have on their students both when they graduate from college and also during their field training / teaching practice. The study also aims to contribute to the assessment of the effectiveness of the College of Education's preparation programme for social studies teachers; the college wants to develop this program to meet the criteria for the accreditation process at the university, a process which started in 2012. The study is also useful at a wider national-planning level; tourism for sustainable development is part of government policy, and they are concerned that students be aware of this and also have a positive attitude towards it. The study can provide an indication to government about how effectively students' awareness and attitudes have been fostered so far.

A number of earlier studies have investigated attitudes towards tourism among both university students and social studies teachers. Ahmed's study (1991) revealed that university students in Egypt had positive attitudes towards tourism and its positive affect on national income and job opportunities.

The study also showed that the students understood the political, cultural and social changes caused by tourism. Abdo (1999) analysed the knowledge and the attitudes to tourism among social studies student teachers both before and after his teaching program. Before following his course, the student teachers had little knowledge about tourism, and held only moderate attitudes towards it; after completing the course, their knowledge had increased and their attitudes had become more positive. Al-Abed (1999) conducted a study investigating the tourism awareness about tourism among primary-level Social Studies teachers and students. The results showed that neither teachers nor students had much knowledge about tourism; both held moderate attitudes towards it. The study also showed no differences resulting from gender, or between teacher and students. Al-Nahwi (2001) conducted a study in Oman investigating the level of tourism awareness of Omani secondary school Social Studies teachers. The results showed that the teachers had a moderate level of awareness, with no differences due to their gender, place of residence or level of experience.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed at investigating the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development. The main focus of this study is:

What are the attitudes of Omani students' teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development? This was broken down into two questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development?
2. Are there significant differences due to gender in the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development?

### **Aims of the Study**

To investigate the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development.

### **Importance of This Study**

- It provides information about the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development.
- It helps to evaluate the preparation program for Omani student teachers of Social Studies.
- It enriches the literature about tourism for sustainable development.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

Data was collected from 65 student teachers of Social Studies; all were in their final year in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman. 26 were male and 39 were female. The study covered all the final-year student teachers in the Social Studies Department.

#### **Instrument**

A questionnaire was used to gather data from the student teachers. The questionnaire was developed by the author and was based on a review of the literature, of Omani government policy and of Omani culture. The questionnaire consisted of 37 items divided into 6 topic areas: attitudes towards tourism; the

economic influence of tourism; the negative social and cultural influences of tourism; tourism management and working in the tourism sector. The range of topics covered in the questionnaire was designed to cover all aspects of tourism and attitudes to it: economic, social, cultural and educational. As Oman is an Islamic and conservative country, questionnaire items were formatted so as to avoid all references to unacceptable topics such as sex or alcohol. The questionnaire was validated by a panel of judges and its reliability was assessed by using the Alpha Cronbach test (81.8).

## Results

### 1. What are the attitudes of Omani student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development?

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of the attitudes of student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development. The table presents results for each topic area of the questionnaire and the items within it. The results show that Omani student teachers of Social Studies hold positive attitudes towards tourism for sustainable development. They are enthusiastic about the positive effects of tourism on the economy and culture, but they are also worried about its negative effects on the cost of living and on the country's culture and lifestyle. They therefore feel that the possible negative effects of tourism should be taken into account when tourism-related activities are being planned and developed. They have positive attitudes towards working in the tourism sector, seeing it as interesting work and also acceptable within Omani society.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of student teachers' attitudes

N	Items	N	Mean	STD
Attitudes towards tourism				
	I feel happy when I see tourists in my country	65	4.35	.694
	I support the orientations of the Government Tourist Investment	65	4.55	.662
	I am proud that my country is among the countries most attractive to tourists	65	4.55	.662
	I support the promotion of tourism in Oman's tourist areas	65	4.49	.886
	I think that tourism contributes to the definition my country globally	65	4.73	.476
	Total domain 1:	65	4.53	.499
Economic dimension of tourism				
	I think that a small percentage of society benefits economically from tourism	65	3.53	1.16
	Tourism increases employment opportunities for job seekers	65	4.32	.937
	Tourism increases national income and raises living standards	65	4.18	.768
	I think tourism develops archaeological areas	65	4.40	.806
	I think tourism increases people's living standards	65	4.40	.745
	I think tourism contributes to the marketing of local products	65	4.12	.910
	I think tourism opens the area for many local and foreign investments	65	4.15	.775
	Total of domain 2:	65	4.16	.520
Social and cultural effect of tourism				
	Tourism promotes interest in cultural inheritance and traditional industries	65	4.46	.639
	Tourism contributes to the development of culture and its conservation.	65	3.86	1.01
	Tourism contributes to the dissemination of local culture globally	65	4.60	.493
	Tourism leads to cultural exchange between peoples and civilizations	65	4.38	.604
	Tourism leads to the preservation of historical buildings	65	4.52	.533
	Tourism makes people feel proud of their heritage	65	4.41	.583
	Tourism improves the level of services in hotels and restaurants etc.	65	4.20	.955
	Tourism leads to the diversity of cultural activities	65	4.18	.682

Total of domain 3	65	4.32	.421
Negative effects of tourism			
Tourism will lead to an increase in rent prices	65	4.47	.589
Tourism leads to an increase in the costs of living	65	4.06	.881
Tourism increases the risk of traffic jams and accidents	65	3.78	1.03
Tourism leads to the spread of unacceptable behavior	65	4.01	.909
Tourism negatively affects the patterns of individual living	65	3.92	.923
Tourism leads to adolescents imitating tourist behavior	65	3.73	1.00
Tourism is a threat to the cultural heritage of society	65	3.16	1.32
Total of domain 4	65	3.88	.654
Tourism management : I support			
Having strict laws for investment in tourism.	65	4.30	.748
The banning of unacceptable behavior by tourists	65	4.26	.972
Selecting investment in tourism which fits our culture	65	4.26	.923
Banning the wearing of unacceptable clothes by tourists	65	4.04	1.16
Taking the environment into consideration in investment in tourism	65	4.43	.847
Total of domain 5	65	4.26	.691
Working in the tourism sector			
I would like to work in the tourism sector	65	3.60	1.16
I encourage people to work in the tourism sector	65	3.87	1.12
I encourage school students to think about working in the tourism sector	65	4.27	.857
I don't think that working in tourism clashes with our values	65	3.66	1.01
I think working in the tourism sector is acceptable by my society	65	4.23	.861
Total of domain 6	65	3.92	.821
Total domains	65	4.18	.308

2. Does the gender of Omani students of Social Studies cause any significant differences in their attitudes towards tourism for sustainable development?

The results show no significant differences with regard to gender in the attitudes of student teachers of Social Studies towards tourism for sustainable development.

Table 2. Mean- Standard deviations and T value of undergraduate attitudes

Domains	sex	N	Mean	STD	T-value	Sig
Attitudes towards tourism	Male	26	4.57	.420	.504	.616
	Female	39	4.51	.550		
Economic dimension of tourism	Male	26	4.18	.635	.262	.794
	Female	39	4.14	.436		
Social and cultural effect of tourism	Male	26	4.26	.389	1.005	.319
	Female	39	4.37	.441		
Negative effects of tourism	Male	26	3.76	.662	1.186	.240
	Female	39	3.95	.646		
Tourism management	Male	26	4.30	.674	.436	.664
	Female	39	4.23	.710		
Working in the tourism sector	Male	26	3.77	1.076	1.226	.225
	Female	39	4.03	.588		
Total	Male	26	4.14	.361	.811	.420
	Female	39	4.20	.269		

## Discussion

The results show that Omani student teachers of Social Studies hold positive attitudes towards tourism for sustainable development. They strongly support the development of the tourism sector, while feeling that its potentially negative effects must be taken into consideration. These attitudes could result from a number of factors: the effect of the preparation program for Social Studies teachers in SQU's College of Education, from the media, from experience or knowledge of Oman's many national festivals such as the Muscat and the Salalah Festival, and/or from government announcements about local tourism. These results contradict the findings of some much earlier studies which showed that university students and Social Studies teachers held only lukewarm attitudes towards tourism, eg (Abdo, 1999; Al-Abed., 1999; Al-Nahwi, 2001).

The student teachers view the prominent position of Oman on the world tourism map as a positive effect of the country's promotion of tourism; they are strongly in favour of government investment in the tourism sector, and they believe it has many advantages, both short- and long-term. They believe that tourism will have a positive effect on the nation's income and living standards, that it will contribute to the development of traditional crafts and products, and that it will increase job opportunities. They also believe that tourism will lead to the conservation of historical buildings and the introduction of Omani culture to other societies, and that it will develop tourism services.

Such attitudes towards tourism are supported by the literature, which clearly shows that people generally have a positive view of the advantages of tourism, according to their direct and indirect reflection on their own life and that of their countries (McCool & Martin 1994; Perdue et al., 1990; Andereck, 1995; Gilbert & Clark, 1997; Lankford 1994; McCool & Martin 1994; Gilbert & Clark, 1997; Matthew & Goodwin, 2001; Lepp, 2006). The positive attitudes to tourism among these students could also be attributable to the general culture of tolerance in Oman, where people accept others easily, and, more specifically, to the desert culture which places a high value on acceptance of others and hospitality to guests and strangers. They might also be influenced by Islamic principles, or by the historical background of Oman and its communication with other societies and countries.

However, the findings do show that student teachers of Social Studies are also concerned about the potentially negative effects of tourism on their culture, as it may cause an increase in the cost of living and give rise to a variety of negative behaviours. Such worries may be caused by a number of factors. Firstly, Oman is a conservative country so it is natural for Omanis to worry about the preservation of their culture and the future of their children, who may be affected by tourism and the cultural changes it may bring. Secondly, Oman's population has only a moderate income; so any increase in the cost of living will affect them directly; this is of particular concern following the price increases caused by the current world financial crises. The concerns found in this study are supported by the results of many other studies which show negative attitudes toward tourism (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Mok et al, 1991; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997; Doggart & Doggart, 1996; Kusluvan, 2000; Aksu & Koksall, 2005; Selvi & Demir, 2007; Countryman, Franco & Venegas, 2005; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005).

The respondents' fears can be explained by a number of factors. Generally, tourists come from different cultures and different economic and social backgrounds, so the possibility of inappropriate and even bad behaviour may be high. Also, tourists usually come to a country only for a short period, with a fixed amount of money to spend during their visit. Any negative occurrences will affect them only briefly, while residents will suffer for the whole year. The students' fears also could be due to the fact that many of them have travelled abroad themselves and have experienced the effects of tourism on the cost of living in other tourist areas; they may also have observed how tourism can have a negative effect on local culture. Due to their fears about the negative impact of tourism, student teachers of Social Studies are deeply concerned about tourism management. They believe that tourism activities should take into consideration environmental and cultural issues, as well as particular aspects of everyday life of people living in tourist areas.

The findings also show that student teachers of Social Studies are themselves interested in working in the tourism sector; they do not believe that working in this sector clashes with their culture, and they encourage others to work in it. Such attitudes could be a result of the good salaries earned in tourism jobs and of government support for the tourism sector; the work also suits those who are interested in travelling from place to place, which is particularly true of teenagers and young people. The findings show no difference between the attitudes of male and female students. This could be due to the fact that all these students attend the same courses, are influenced by the same media, culture and national festivals, and that they are all the same age.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The study shows that student teachers of social studies hold highly positive attitudes towards tourism for sustainable development. They view positively the advantages of tourism to their own lives and their country, but they are deeply concerned about maintaining a balance between the advantages of tourism and its disadvantages, so they strongly recommend careful management of tourism in order to ensure that its negative effects are minimized. The research recommends that more studies related to tourism for sustainable development be conducted, investigating both a wider body of university students as well as the general public in Oman. It also recommends conducting a study to investigate students' actual knowledge about tourism for sustainable development.

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